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Illegal Israeli actions in Occupied East Jerusalem and the rest of the Occupied Palestinian Territory

Security Council
Seventy-third year

Identical letters dated 22 May 2018 from the Permanent Observer of the State of Palestine to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General, the President of the General Assembly and the President of the Security Council

It has been a week since the 14 May massacre carried out by Israel, the occupying Power, against Palestinian civilians in the Gaza Strip, in which at least 62 civilians were killed and more than 2,000 civilians injured, including children. As the traumatic causes and consequences of this heinous crime remain without remedy, tensions continue to rise and despair continues to deepen, threatening even further destabilization.

The fact remains that, despite our repeated appeals for urgent international action to deter Israel from its criminal behaviour towards the Palestinian people, the absence of serious efforts to hold the occupying Power accountable and reign it in has only made our people more vulnerable to the brutality of this illegal occupation. We are thus compelled to reiterate the call made at the 15 May emergency meeting of the Security Council, and countless times prior to that, for the protection of the Palestinian people, in compliance with international humanitarian and human rights law and numerous relevant resolutions, in particular concerning the protection of civilians in armed conflict, including children.

This call for protection has been echoed widely in the Security Council chamber and from capitals and humanitarian and human rights organizations worldwide. It is a call to protect and ensure the safety and well-being of a defenceless civilian population being held captive under a more than half-century occupation and a more than decade-long blockade. It has equally been a call to rescue the tenets of international law, which are being shredded by the occupying Power and those shielding it from censure and aiding it in its criminality. The consequences have been, and continue to be, dire for the Palestinian people, compelling us to persistently raise the alarm on this matter.

In this regard, I must inform you that on 15 May, the day following the massacre, Israeli occupying forces shot and killed two more Palestinian civilians, Bilal Budeir Hussein al-Ashram, age 17, and Naser Ahmad Mahmoud Ghurab, age 51, and injured

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40 other civilians by live ammunition, including 7 children, a paramedic and a journalist. On 19 May, two Palestinian civilians succumbed to the wounds they had sustained from Israel live ammunition: Mouin Abdelhamid al-Saai, age 58, and Mohammed Mazin Alian, age 20. This brings the total number of Palestinian civilians killed to 108, including 15 children, since the Great March of Return began on 30 March.

There is an abundance of evidence that these killings were deliberate and not the result of some kind of oversight or overreaction by the occupation forces. Indeed, many of those killed were shot in the back, with weapons designed to induce maximum damage to the human body, and many were hundreds of metres from the fence: men, women, children, journalists and paramedics posing no threat whatsoever.

In this regard, it must be pointed out that Israeli army spokesman Lieutenant-Colonel Jonathan Conricus stated of Palestinian protesters, "We shoot in order to stop them so that they cannot harm the security infrastructure and infiltrate into Israel", a direct admission that the use of snipers and live fire to shoot protesters was not to prevent an imminent threat to life.

Amnesty International has described the killings on 14 May as "another horrific example of the Israeli military using excessive force and live ammunition in a totally deplorable way. This is a violation of international standards, with Israeli forces in some instances committing what appear to be wilful killings constituting war crimes."

A spokesperson for the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights has stated that "The rules on the use of force under international law have been repeated many times but appear to have been ignored again and again. It seems anyone is liable to be shot dead or injured: women, children, press personnel, first responders, bystanders, and at almost any point up to 700 m from the fence." Journalists and human rights observers have further described "individual snipers safely ensconced hundreds of feet, even farther, away, targeting individual protesters and executing them one at a time" (Human Rights Watch).

As firmly expressed by the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Nickolay Mladenov, at the 15 May Security Council meeting: "There is no justification for the killing. There is no excuse." Yet, some statements at the Council meeting tried to do just that — to justify the massacre. It was extremely disheartening to hear in those remarks the obscene accusation that Palestinians are somehow responsible for their own deaths. Since when does the victim bring about the act of his or her own victimization?

Had the victims of brutal massacres such as the ones witnessed on 14 May and over the past seven weeks been non-Palestinian, non-Arab, would some countries have dared accuse these victims of staging their own deaths? Of being responsible for their own suffering? Would the Security Council have been deaf to their cries for freedom? Would it have been unable to issue a statement merely calling for the respect of international law, an end to the slaughter and an investigation into the killing and wounding of so many civilians?

Statements illustrating this dehumanization of the Palestinian people include a United States government spokesperson calling the killing of Palestinians "a propaganda attempt". Gilad Erdan, Israel's Minister of Strategic Affairs, referred to Palestinian protesters in Gaza as "Nazis" twice on 14 May. An Israeli government spokesperson also "explained" that the use of live fire and the execution of Palestinian protesters in Gaza is taking place because Israel "can't put all these people in jail". In this regard, the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination has expressed concern about the "rise of racist hate speech and incitement to racist

violence against Palestinians by Israeli governmental officials and members of the Israeli Security Forces".

Palestinians, like all other human beings, deserve the attention and action of the international community and must be accorded protection in line with international law. The message should not be sent that their lives are dispensable, not worthy of the international community's time, not worthy of even a statement by the Security Council. To those who doubt, we repeat: Palestinian lives matter too. We grieve the lives of all who have been lost. The names of the Palestinian civilian protesters executed on 14 May are the following:

1. Laila Anwar al-Ghandoor, 8 months old
2. Ezz el-din Musa Mohamed Alsamaak, age 14
3. Wisaal Fadl Ezzat Alsheikh Khalil, age 15
4. Ahmed Adel Musa Alshaer, age 16
5. Saeed Mohamed Abu Alkheir, age 16
6. Saadi Said Fahmi Abu Salah, age 16
7. Talal Adel Ibrahim Mattar, age 16
8. Ibrahim Ahmed Alzarqa, age 18
9. Abdulrahman Sami Abu Mattar, age 18
10. Bilal Badeer Hussein al-Ashram, age 18
11. Eman Ali Sadiq Alsheikh, age 19
12. Kamil Jihad Kamil Mihna, age 19
13. Zayid Mohamed Hasan Omar, age 19
14. Motassem Fawzy Abu Louley, age 20
15. Anas Hamdan Salim Qadeeh, age 21
16. Ali Mohamed Ahmed Khafajah, age 21
17. Mohamed Abd Alsalam Harz, age 21
18. Mahmoud Wael Mahmoud Jundeyah, age 21
19. Yehia Ismail Rajab Aldaqoor, age 22
20. Mustafa Mohamed Samir Mahmoud Almasry, age 22
21. Ezz Eldeen Nahid Aloyutey, age 23
22. Mahmoud Mustafa Ahmed Assaf, age 23
23. Mokhtar Kaamil Salim Abu Khamash, age 23
24. Mahmoud Saber Hamad Abu Taeemah, age 23
25. Ahmed Fayez Harb Shahadah, age 23
26. Ahmed Awad Allah, age 24
27. Ahmed Zahir Hamid Alshawa, age 24
28. Mahmoud Yahya Abdawahab Hussain, age 24
29. Khalil Ismail Khalil Mansor, age 25
30. Mohamed Hasan Mustafa Alabadilah, age 25

31. Mohamed Ashraf Abu Sitta, age 26
32. Bilal Ahmed Abu Diqah, age 26
33. Ahmed Salim Alyaan Aljarf, age 26
34. Ahmed Majed Qaasim Ata Allah, age 27
35. Mohamed Samir Duwedar, age 27
36. Ahmed Mohammed Ibrahim Hamdan, age 27
37. Ahmed Mahmoud Mohammed Alrantisi, age 27
38. Mahmoud Rabah Abu Maamar, age 28
39. Musab Yousef Abu Leilah, age 28
40. Ahmed Fawzy Altetr, age 28
41. Mohamed Abdelrahman Meqdad, age 28
42. Alaa Alnoor Ahmed Alkhatib, age 28
43. Obaidah Salim Farhan, age 30
44. Jihad Mufid al-Farra, age 30
45. Ismail Khalil Ramadhan Aldaahuk, age 30
46. Omar Jomaa Abu Ful, age 30
47. Ahmed Abdullah Aladini, age 30
48. Fadi Hassan Abu Salah, age 30
49. Motaz Bassam Kamil al-Nunu, age 31
50. Mohammed Riyad Abdulrahman Alamudi, age 31
51. Jihad Mohammed Othman Mousa, age 31
52. Shahir Mahmoud Mohammed Almadhoon, age 32
53. Mahmoud Sulayman Ibrahim Aql, age 32
54. Mohammed Hani Hosni Alnajjar, age 33
55. Fadl Mohamed Ata Habshy, age 34
56. Mousa Jabr Abdulsalam Abu Hasnayn, age 35
57. Mohammed Mahmoud Abdulmoti Abdal'al, age 39
58. Abdelsalam Yousef Abdelwahab, age 39
59. Nasser Ahmed Mahmoud Ghrab, age 51

60–62. Unidentified

Additionally, more than 12,600 Palestinian civilians have been injured throughout the Occupied Palestinian Territory since the protests began. Of those injured, most have required hospitalization, with many still in serious or critical condition. Among them are more than 3,500 who have been shot with live ammunition, many of whom will be disabled for life.

In this regard, Doctors without Borders stated on 14 May that "What happened today is unacceptable and inhuman. ... It is unbearable to witness such a massive number of unarmed people being shot in such a short time. ... This bloodbath is the continuation of the Israeli army's policy during the last seven weeks: shooting with

live ammunition at demonstrators, on the assumption that anyone approaching the separation fence is a legitimate target. Most of the wounded will be condemned to suffer lifelong injuries."

The mass influx of injuries has led the already crumbling health-care system in Gaza to be placed under such strain that it is now "near breaking point", according to Medical Aid for Palestinians, a United Kingdom-based non-governmental organization working on the ground in Gaza. As stated by a spokesperson for the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, "Those suffering life-threatening injuries face a nightmarish scenario in the absence of adequate hospital beds and medical services. We are still witnessing cases in which injured demonstrators are effectively prevented by Israel from exiting Gaza for treatment."

The United Nations Coordinator for Humanitarian and Development Activities in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, Jamie McGoldrick, expressed on 17 May that "Medicines and supplies are being depleted, with few resources to replenish them. Our ability to reach affected families, including children, and provide assistance is extremely limited due to funding shortfalls. Without new funding, the impact on the survivors of recent events will be far worse and our ability to respond to any new needs will be severely limited." These new needs are developing in the context of the pre-existing humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza caused by over a decade of Israeli blockade and repeated Israeli military aggressions.

To compound this appalling reality, Israel, the occupying Power, has continued targeting medical staff and equipment. According to the World Health Organization, 1 medical staff member has been killed and 229 injured while providing treatment to the wounded since the start of the protests on 30 March. Thirty-two ambulances have also been damaged.

The paramedic who was killed, Musa Abuhassanin, was shot in the chest while rescuing another victim under fire. He had just come back from treating Dr. Tarek Loubani, a Canadian, Ontario-based physician, who was shot and wounded on 14 May while wearing "full hospital greens" and standing with a group of other medical professionals away from the main protest area, but in view of three Israeli sniper outposts.

Those who have not been killed while peacefully protesting in Gaza continue to die a slow death as a result of Israel's continued cruel blockade of Gaza, which has entered its eleventh year. For example, the world's leading authority on Gaza's economy, Sara Roy, has stated that "Innocent human beings, most of them young, are slowly being poisoned by the water they drink", as 95 per cent of Gaza's water resources have become unfit for human consumption.

Against this backdrop of criminal activity in Gaza, we witnessed another obscenity a week ago, on 14 May: the juxtaposition of United States and Israeli officials celebrating their violations of international law during the opening of the United States Embassy in Jerusalem with the images of bloodshed as innocent civilians were being massacred about 40 miles away in Gaza. We reiterate that, through its provocative and illegal decision, in blatant contravention of Security Council resolutions, including resolutions 476 (1980), 478 (1980) and 2334 (2016), and the unequivocal prohibition of the acquisition of territory by force, the United States has aggravated this situation and further emboldened Israeli impunity to persist with its violations of international law and emboldened other States, including Guatemala and Paraguay, to flout international law and United Nations resolutions.

The international community must not remain silent in the face of this illegal and unjust situation. In the light of Israel's wilful killing and maiming of unarmed

protesters in Gaza, we again call for international protection for the Palestinian people as a matter of urgency.

We welcome the 18 May decision of the Human Rights Council to establish an independent, international commission of inquiry, with a view to investigating all cases of death and injury since 30 March and ensuring accountability for the violations of international law that took place in the context of the large-scale civilian protests in Gaza. This investigation must be just the start of efforts at the United Nations to bring an end to the illegal occupation of the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, to the illegal blockade of Gaza and to the decades of dispossession of Palestine refugees, all of which constitute the root causes of this ongoing crisis and the brutality we have witnessed in the past month.

We also appeal to all States to continue their vital humanitarian assistance to the Palestinian people, especially in view of the medical emergency in Gaza, and to increase their support to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, which, beyond provision of assistance, remains a lifeline for so many vulnerable refugees in the absence of a just solution and amid the growing despair and uncertainty about the future.

Despite the decades of oppression faced by the Palestinian people, we remain committed to ensuring their rights, justice and human dignity, and remain convinced that peaceful means and international legality will lead to an end to their suffering. In these days of mourning, we once again call upon the international community, with the Security Council at the forefront, to act, in line with legal obligations and commitments, to address this crisis and reinforce the value and integrity of international law, as well as our faith in the international system.

The present letter is in follow-up to our 635 previous letters regarding the ongoing crisis in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, which constitutes the territory of the State of Palestine. These letters, dated from 29 September 2000 (A/55/432-S/2000/921) to 14 May 2018 (A/ES-10/781-S/2018/458), constitute a basic record of the crimes being committed by Israel, the occupying Power, against the Palestinian people since September 2000. For all of these war crimes, acts of State terror and systematic human rights violations being committed against the Palestinian people, Israel, the occupying Power, must be held accountable and the perpetrators brought to justice.

I should be grateful if you would arrange to have the text of the present letter distributed as a document of the tenth emergency special session of the General Assembly, under agenda item 5, and of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Riyad **Mansour**
Ambassador
Permanent Observer of the State of Palestine
to the United Nations